

Story #45 (Tape 15)  
1961-1962

Narrator: Kadir Büküş, 75 years old  
Location: Home of the muhtar in the village of Karahamzah, Balâ kaza, Ankara, Prov.<sup>3</sup>  
90 km. south of Ankara on the road to Konya: 50 people listening.

Date: February 1962

#45 Wife -- fe. i. h. fu /

The Faithful Wife

Tekerleme

We bought a goose from the market.<sup>1</sup> We kept boiling it for three days, and it kept sticking its head out of the cauldron for three days. Eight of us kept striking <sup>flint and steel</sup> flint to steel, and nine of us tried to build a fire big enough to boil that goose, but the goose kept looking at us from the cauldron as we boiled it for three days. Time within time, and when the sieve was in the straw,<sup>2</sup> and when the camel was the town crier, and when the water buffalo was the barber, there was in the town of Aksaray<sup>3</sup> a man called Mahmüt the Orphan, who had neither father nor mother.

Typing: All of this  
pung. i. h. is a  
tekerleme, but  
it's only the  
word tekerleme

Sons -- five -- of ağa

daughter -- beautiful -- of ağa

In that same town there was also a rich āğa who had five sons and a beautiful daughter. Mahmüt the Orphan fell in love with this girl, and she was also interested in him. Mahmüt went to the āğa and said to him,

Ağa -- five  
sons of

Ağa -- daughter of  
sui

"Please let me marry your daughter." After trying very hard, Mahmüt at last gained the consent of the āğa to marry the girl, and their wedding was held in the usual manner. Mahmüt put his wife in a modest house and left

<sup>1</sup>This is a standard tekerleme, a nonsense jingle, highly rhythmic and rimed, used as an attention getter at the beginning of folk tales.

<sup>2</sup>The impossibility of most of the tekerleme is obvious. When the sieve was in the straw may require some explanation. Grain is threshed in several stages on farms not yet equipped with machinery. Placed on a carefully prepared plot of clayey ground, it is cut into small bits by a flinttoothed platform that is dragged over it for hours. This chopped material is then winnowed to separate the grain from the chaff; thrown up into the air with pitchforks, the grain drops close to the winnower while the chaff blows away a few feet and forms a separate pile. Among the chaff, however, there are always some stalks to which there still cling some heads of grain. The straw is, therefore, shaken in a large-mesh sieve through which the heads drop. (The sieve is 4-5 feet square, and the netting, with interstices about one inch square, is made of tightly twisted hide.) The straw, of course, is always put into the sieve, not the sieve into the straw, as the narrator pretends here.

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to find a job for himself and make his fortune. In a neighboring village, he found a job on the farm of another ağa for whom he worked for eighteen years. Finally, one day he said to that ağa, "I have a family of my own, and so, with your permission, I want to leave and go to them."

"All right, Mahmüt," said the ağa.

and there the ağa bought four things: \_\_\_\_\_

as gift a cape. After paying Mahmüt generously, he also gave him these four things as gifts and then bade him farewell.

Mahmüt traveled towards his home, and as he approached the town of Aksaray,<sup>3</sup> he stopped at the outskirts at a fountain. As he stood by the fountain watering his horse, he saw approaching a woman whose gait reminded him of his own wife, but he could not be certain whether or not it was she. When she drew closer, however, he realized that it was nobody else but Zeynep, his own wife, whom he had not seen for eighteen years. Not knowing what to say at first, he asked her for a cup of water. He wondered what she would do. Not having seen him for such a long time, the woman failed to recognize Mahmüt. He sang to her, and she answered in song.

Mahmüt: "Oh, bride that is coming,  
Let me have a drink from your hands."

Zeynep: "I cannot give you any water;  
Drink it yourself and go on your way."

Mahmüt: "But, bride, I am ill and I cannot get down;  
And if I did, I could not mount again;  
And if I drank by myself my thirst would be unquenched.  
Please give me water from your beautiful hands."

Zeynep: "Oh, traveler and stranger to me,  
My father would discover you;  
If you are a traveler, then go on your way;  
You would die if my five brothers heard about you."

<sup>3</sup>A town in central Anatolia, about thirty kilometers southeast of Tuz Gölü (the Salt Lake), on the road between Ankara and Adana, and about halfway between those two cities.

*(Chestity -- test of)*

*(Cante fable)* pp 7-8, 9  
8/10-11

Mahmüt: "Oh, lady, my business is traveling.  
I care not a bit for your brothers,  
And even if they numbered ten,  
I'd embrace you before taking leave."

Zeynep: "Have you not moved from highland to highland?  
Have you not drunk from cold-water fountains?  
Have you not passed by beautiful ladies?  
Drink your water and go on your way."

Mahmüt: "Yes, I traveled from highland to highland.  
And I drank out of cold-water fountains,  
And beautiful ladies I saw.  
But when I saw you, my heart became parched."

After this conversation, the woman was rather frightened, and so she filled her pitcher with <sup>water</sup> and started home. Mahmüt followed her on horseback, and when they entered the town, he went to the house of the muhtar<sup>4</sup> of the section they were in. "Greetings to you, oh Muhtar," he said.

<sup>Aleykümselâm</sup>  
"Greetings to you, oh greeter," answered the muhtar. Because Mahmüt had been away for eighteen years, the muhtar also failed to recognize him. He called the bekci<sup>5</sup> and asked him, "Whose turn is it to play host to a visitor?"<sup>6</sup>

The bekci spoke with several of the home owners, and then he came back to the muhtar and reported: "It is Zeynep's turn to put up a visitor tonight, but she says that she will not have this man."

"She must accept him as a guest," said the muhtar, and he ordered the bekci to take Mahmüt to Zeynep's house. When she opened the door of her

<sup>4</sup>The head man of a village or of the mahalle (district) of a town.

<sup>5</sup>The night watchman.

<sup>6</sup>In every one of the 40,000 villages in Turkey a stranger can find hospitality. Most villages have one or more specially reserved guest rooms; in those which do not, guests are given free lodging in a private home, the residents taking turns in providing this hospitality. A stranger does not have to ask for this hospitality; it is pressed upon him.

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house, Zeynep was displeased to see that it was the same man who had sung to her at the fountain.

"I have no room in my house to put him up," she said. "I cannot have him."

"Very well," said Mahmüt, "Let us leave. She refuses to have me."

They returned to the muhtar, telling him what had happened. The muhtar became very angry and asked, "Why doesn't she have you as a guest?" This time the muhtar himself took Mahmüt to her house and knocked on the door. When Zeynep opened the door, the muhtar demanded, "Why do you not accept this man as a guest tonight?"

While the muhtar argued with Zeynep about having the visitor cared for at her house, Mahmüt began to sing:

Mahmüt: "Open the door a bit farther, oh bride;  
Then I can look at your face.  
Comply with the muhtar's request,  
And welcome me in as your guest."

Zeynep: "What you call muhtar is only a dog,  
And bran is his daily food.  
I have no room for a guest,  
So I can't put you up in my house."

The muhtar became so angry with her for calling him a dog that he walked away leaving Mahmüt still standing outside. Soon a handsome young man came to the house from a field nearby where he had been plowing. Mahmüt did not know who this young man was.

"What are you doing here?" he asked Mahmüt.

"I was sent here as a guest for the night by the muhtar, but the woman in this house will not let me enter," said Mahmüt.

"It does not matter. I shall let you in," said the young man, and then he shouted to his mother, "Open the door!"

Mahmüt did not know that this was his son. He thought that Zeynep had

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married again after he had left, and he said to himself, "What a handsome young man she has found for herself!"

The young man helped Mahmüt to carry into the house his <sup>already done</sup> ~~saddle~~, his whip, and his cape, and then he took his horse and tied it in the stable. Zeynep, while this was going on, kept a stern face, because she did not recognize Mahmüt at all.

Mahmüt: "Oh, bride of the house of the double doors,<sup>7</sup>  
You walk about swinging your hips.  
Show me the way to your house, oh bride,  
And welcome me here as your guest."

Zeynep: "I'm the bride of the house with the double doors,  
And I walk about swinging my hips.  
This is the way to my house within,  
But I can't welcome you as my guest."

From this Mahmüt understood that this was their own home, and so he asked her, "Who is the young man staying with you, oh bride?"

"The young man staying with me is my own son," answered Zeynep.

When Mahmüt heard this he was greatly relieved and pleased. Again he began to sing:

Mahmüt: "The <sup>Tatar</sup> ~~tatar~~ comes from Istanbul  
Wearing his cape askew,  
Where does this young man sleep, oh bride?  
Welcome me now as your guest."

Zeynep: "Let the tatar come from Istanbul,  
Throw up his whip, and catch it again.  
Strange visitors go and stay at inns;  
I ~~can't have~~ you here as my guest."

Mahmüt: "The <sup>firmen</sup> ~~farman~~ comes from Istanbul,  
But there's no strength left in my knees."

<sup>7</sup> Double doors are a sign of wealth

<sup>8</sup> The Tatar or Tartar tribe of Turks, many of whom came to Turkey with the forces of Genghis Khan, were renowned horsemen. Even as late as the nineteenth century they were used as post boys and couriers to carry dispatches throughout the Ottoman Empire. Many accounts tell of the great distances they rode in record time. In Kinglake's travel book about Turkey, Eothen, he describes a tatar courier (Chapter 11).

<sup>9</sup> Imperial decree.

Let Mahmüt the lover now be your kurban,<sup>10</sup>  
And welcome me in as your guest."

[Sacrifice]

When Zeynep heard him say "Mahmüt the Lover," she recognized him and responded:

Zeynep: "Let the <sup>1</sup>ferman come from Istanbul,  
And let me give strength to your knees.  
My arms are your cushion, my hair is your blanket,<sup>11</sup>  
And Zeynep, your kurban. Oh, welcome, my lover!"

Singing this, she ran and embraced him.

<sup>10</sup> Sacrificed lamb. Although the word kurban can refer to any sacrifice or victim, at any time during the year, it is best known by visitors to Turkey for its use in naming the Festival of Sacrifices (Kurban Bayram) which begins forty days after the end of the Ramazan month.

<sup>11</sup> She uses here the expression hos geldiniz! the conventional greeting used to welcome one into a home in Turkey.